

EMPLOYING LITERATURE TO EXPOSE EFFECTS OF POOR ECONOMY ON THE SOCIETY IN AMMA DARKO'S "FACELESS"

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Abstract

Literature is a time-tested instrument of satire and criticism. Several literati and literary writers have rebuked poverty, corruption, injustice and inequality in the society. Literalists do expose evils and vices in the society through their works of arts. "Faceless" by Amma Darko unveils the effects of poor economic status on the society as well as how the government's shirking of responsibility affects children, especially. The work has nexus between Amma Darko's home country, Ghana and Nigeria. In the work of art, poverty sent many out of schools just like in Nigeria where the poor economy has turned many out of school girls into prostitutes. Parents send their children to the streets to beg for alms to keep families' souls and spirit together, while the ritualists, rapists, kidnappers, bandits, fraudsters and corrupt politicians are experiencing free days. The paper recommends that there should be a consistent building of potent institutions that will prevent corruption in public service; the Nigerian government, as a matter of urgency, should come up with policies that will ameliorate the poor condition of masses; and Nigerian citizens should act with conscience wherever they found themselves.

Keywords: Faceless, Economy, Literature, Society, Effect

Introduction

Economy is the state of a country or region in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money. According to Collins Dictionary, economy is the system to which the money, industry and trade of a country or region are organized. A country's economy is the wealth that it gets from business and industry and the use of the minimum amount of money, time or other resources needed to achieve something so that nothing is wasted. Nigerian economy is evidently not well organized. It is lopsided. This is visible in how the rich of the nation are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The leaders continue to amass the wealth of the nation to themselves and relations. In the words of Halima (2022) "Faces of Shame",

bleary-eyed faces of shame
adorn silos of our wealth
devouring all that we have
stunting our progress and growth
in defiance of our cries for change
as they gallivant in gallant dances of shame
these ministers in robes of theft
epitomes of porky lifestyle...

Poor economy has led to countless societal vices ranging from kidnapping to prostitution, rituals, pipeline vandalism, corruption, wickedness, armed robbery, yahoo yahoo, yahoo plus and many others. There is no gain saying in the fact that Nigeria as a nation is in poor economy condition. It is condemnable that life is no longer secured in Nigeria. This is at variance with the fundamental human rights.

According to Famakinwa (2016), findings showed that the economic situation in Nigeria is getting bad by the day as prices of foodstuff and other essential needs have jumped up; some financial institutions in order to wade through this hard time resulted to sacking of workers while some slash salaries by 20-50 percent. Nigerianfinder.com (2016) also opined that a larger part of the citizenry is ravaged by poverty. People are seen struggling to get basic needs. The heavy dependence of the economy on the exportation crude oil has created a narrow and weak economy base. This has led to inability of the government to provide adequately for the people. The website further gave the following five causes of poverty in Nigeria:

1. Low economic growth performance. The Nigerian economy has a low performance and the growth rate is very low. This has contributed to the level of poverty in the country. There is inadequate generation of employment to the teeming youth in our country.
2. Crime and Violence. The incessant unrest and attacks by the insurgency have created a gaping hole in the society. This has translated to an increase in the poverty levels in our country.

3. Weak governance. Corruption, poor programme implementation and monitoring among others have contributed immensely to poverty in Nigeria.
4. Ill health and disease. These tend to suck up productivity and limit entrepreneurial activities thus reducing the viable contribution to the economy.
5. Debt burden. The socio-economic in every society is largely dependent on huge capital investments both by the public and private sectors. A debt ridden economy becomes handicapped and shifts focus to debt servicing instead of economic development and creation of employment. This creates a static economy which leads to an increase in poverty.

Bello (2022) opined that Nigeria, like many underdeveloped countries have struggled with implementing blueprints to ensure the economic development of their nations without achieving desired results.

Economy and security are close allies. A nation that is economically buoyant is bound to experience adequate security and vice versa. From the inception, security has been made mandatory for human existence. The Holy Bible in Genesis 3:1-11 accounts that after creation, God made the first man and woman secured by housing them in the Garden of Eden. Without adequate security, man and nature alike will go in disarray; nations cannot develop and society will experience economic stagnation and recession. Amaefule, Fabiyi, Adepegba, and Onuba (2017) asserted that between January and September 2017, 4.07 millions of Nigerians became unemployed based on an analysis of the unemployment report for the third quarter released by the National Bureau of Statistics. The Bureau in the report stated that the number of Nigerians that became unemployed rose from 11.92 million in the first quarter of this year to 13.58 million and 15.99 million in the second and third quarters of the year respectively.

Using literature as a means of exposing effects of poor economy in the society in Amma Darko “Faceless”

Literature has been an effective instrument of satire, criticism and sensibility. Countless literary arts have rebuked poverty, corruption, injustice and inequality in the society through different characters. Literature has taught and still teaches lessons of fairness, hard work, humility, honesty, justice, unity and many more. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, potency

of anger and its ability to thwart destiny fulfilment is strongly portrayed in the protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo. Likewise, in S. A. O. Oladunjoye's *Don in the Valley*, a lesson of self control and sexual purity were learnt from Dr. Benson, who despite all his academic attainment and prowess slipped into adulterous mud.

According to Akuso (2015), the role of literature and creativity in enhancing integration and development cannot be overemphasized. Creative writers have often used their creative works to comment on certain burning issues in the society and to advocate for unity and mutual co-existence for meaningful and sustainable development. Indeed, if there is any time in the history of our generation that literary creativity in English should be encouraged, it is now. Bamikunle (1999) also in Akuso asserts that literature plays a leading role, whether as oral or in its written norms in setting cultural norms and assessing and refining existing culture.

Moreover, Oyewole (2006) opined that the three genres-drama, prose and poetry are satirical, especially when a dramatist, novelist or poet adopts the literary weapon called satire to fight corruption or corruptible practices in the society so as to improve or change the societal well being in all its ramifications.

Amma Darko "Faceless" highlights the plight of street children. Through the work of art, the state of the children insecurity is discovered. Many of them are forced outside their homes due to parental irresponsibility and economic hardship. Unfortunately, they could not receive respite because the society was hostile and unreceptive to them. They fell into the hands of the rapists and many of them lost their purposes for existence. According to Anyidoro, in the introductory part of the book, children are found talking and speaking and acting above their age. This should not surprise us having been abandoned to the streets, each one of them has had to grow rather quickly into the ways of the world in order to take up for themselves those responsibilities on which their parents have turned their backs. (pxvi). In the book, we see a lot of children being exposed to insecurity; children like Fofu, Baby T, Poison, and several others were sent to the street due to reasons varying from poverty to parental irresponsibility to government insensitivity to the plight of the masses. The scenario indeed replicates Nigerian situation!

on pxxiv of the text, again we read:

"our society will never know peace until we pay the full price for the children we have abandoned, until we learn to do the right thing by those others we hope to bring into our lives. And beyond the children, our society must also learn to do right by the class of socially and economically disadvantaged people "produced " by our various failed development programme "

According to Darko, perhaps the most frightening lesson in "Faceless" is the fact that having lost their moral authority over their children, parents like Maa Tsuru are totally paralyzed by fear of terror such that Fofu in her innocence insists she wants to see government. What she does not know is that government itself has lost its priorities; its sense of direction; it has become dysfunctional and deaf to the cries of children abandoned.

The book revealed poor conditions of people. For example, Maa Tsuru, Fofu's mother leaned by her chaffed door sill, her blank eyes staring into nothingness, and Fofu's eyes beheld the creativity wooden date of the compound house. The following expressed poor living conditions of both adults and children on p 28 of the text:

"...Fofu could have been one of the numerous screening children, scrambling with the sheep and goats and chickens for space to play and exist in the common compound. Fofu could have been the girl in the tattered brown underpants with the diseased red hair and a protruding stomach, carried on legs that were as thin as two dried sticks or the other in the flour-sac indecent with a body ravaged by rashes and whose nose seemed to never stop running... "

This poor condition made parents to lose control of their children. For example, “in the entire three hundred and sixty five days of the previous year, Fofo had visited the house not more than twice...” (p.33) Deep down inside her, she felt some affection for Maa Tsuru, yet an overpowering urge to hate her also consumed her sometimes.

The scenarios revealed the psychological torture of both parents and their children. Fofo especially believed that it was the mother who dumped her into the world. These experiences are similar to those of parents and children in Nigeria. Most children left home in search of greener pastures without parental consent. Many parents did not see their children again. This adventure had led many children into troubles, panicking sudden destruction and ill health.

The poor economy in Nigeria has turned many girls into prostitutes just like in *Faceless*". Adade Kabria's husband explained that recent survey they conducted for a programme revealed that all the girls they talked to were already sexually active... for many of them, rape was their first sexual experience...many were roaming about, oblivious to whether or not they were HIV positive (p.52).

In Nigeria, poverty has sent many out of schools. Parents send their children to the streets to beg for alms to keep families' souls and spirit together. This scenario is also seen in *Faceless* as Kabria's attempt to inform and probably encourage a mother beggar to send her child to school turned on a deaf ear. Kabria ended up being insulted obviously because the woman felt being neglected by the society. Moreover on p.68, there was a case of a girl that was gruesomely murdered. The girl's face was mutilated and her head was completely shaved. In fact, the hair on every part of her body was gone. Although the intention of her killer is not known, but her case resembles Nigeria situation where as a result of poverty people do all sorts of evil practices to become rich.

Poverty, a result of corruption, has led to all sorts of evil acts in the society. For example, Saturday Punch of September, 2017 recorded the story of how a girl was hacked to death in most brutal manner. In the words of Dumo, the reporter, “after slashing her throat with a knife, the assailant dumped her remains in front of a shrine sitting at a corner of the compound.” In the same vein, the story was told of how the police in Balyesa State in Nigeria have apprehended a 47 year old man, Moses Otimba who killed a five-day old baby boy he fathered with the younger

sister of his pregnant wife. Having impregnated the girl, Joy, he killed the child after birth and buried it in a shallow grave near a river. (Utebor, 2017).

Corruption has sent many to early grave. The prisons as well as many government institutions are in abysmal state. Corruption has led to incessant strike. Government times without number renege on their agreement with the workers. A case study is how the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASSU) were paid half salary having resumed from a protracted eight months strike. Oloja (2017:13) asserted that even corruption crept into the mainstream of civil service recruitment and promotion. There were pieces of evidence then that even the examination that was introduced into promotion of senior civil servants including those in the directorate cadre and permanent secretaries through the Federal Civil Service Commission and Office of the Head of the Federation was corrupted. Many mediocre directors and permanent secretaries were thus promoted through organized corruption as they allegedly paid their way to the top.

Amma Darko's "Faceless" indeed depicts the economy situation in Nigeria and its attendant consequences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has x-rayed how a literary work has been a potent weapon in revealing societal misdemeanors and crime. In Amma Darko "Faceless", Nigerian situation is exposed. The scenes and scenarios in the prose replicate Nigerian situation. Based on this, the study recommends the following:

- The paper aligns with Oloja (2017) that there should be a concomitant building of institutions that will continue to prevent corruption in public service. There should be concomitant policy thrust to institutionalize transparency and accountability in the governance system.
- Government, as a matter of urgency, should come up with policies that will ameliorate the poor condition of masses
- Nigerian citizens should act with conscience wherever they found themselves.

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